



# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

## T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, MISSISSIPPI



### PUBLIC SCOPING FOR T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, MISSISSIPPI

#### Introduction

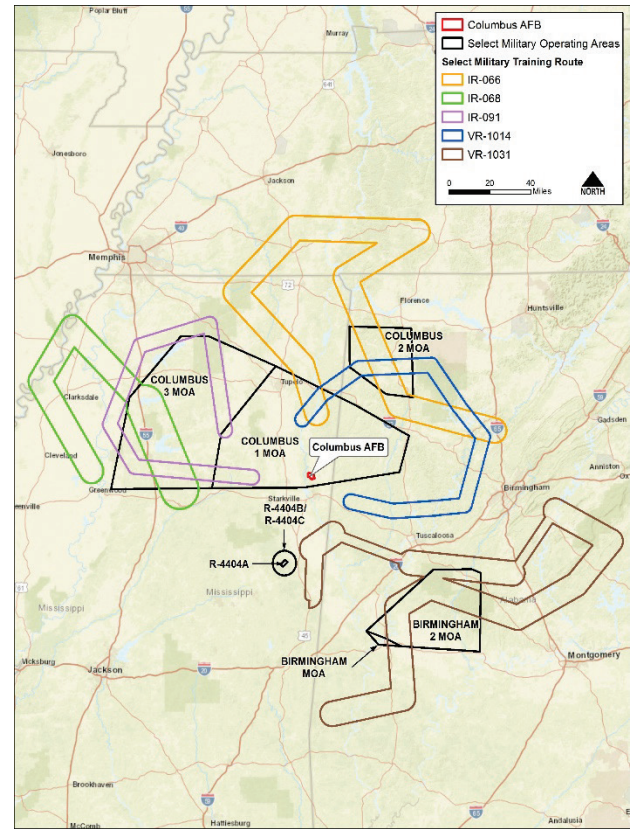
The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted to address concerns about federal actions and their effects on the environment. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is the most detailed analysis prescribed by regulations implementing NEPA. The U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) has published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, pursuant to NEPA, for the proposed T-7A recapitalization at Columbus Air Force Base (AFB). Recapitalization entails introduction of T-7A Red Hawk aircraft and flight operations at Columbus AFB and associated airspace to replace all T-38C Talon aircraft assigned to the installation; introduction of nighttime (between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.) T-7A flight operations; changes to the number of personnel and dependents in the Columbus AFB region; and construction and upgrade of support and maintenance facilities. The number of T-7A aircraft, aircraft operations, and nighttime operations is evaluated as part of the Proposed Action and action alternatives described on the back of this brochure.

#### Background

DAF proposes to recapitalize the flight training program at Columbus AFB with T-7A aircraft because the T-38C is expected to reach the end of its service life within the next decade. Training with the T-38C fails to prepare pilots for the technological advancements of modern fourth and fifth generation aircraft including nighttime flight training. The Secretary of the Air Force has made strategic basing decisions to recapitalize existing T-38C pilot training installations, and Columbus AFB would be the second of five T-38C installations to be environmentally analyzed for possible recapitalization.



Photo Credit: Boeing T-7A Red Hawk Website, September 2021, <https://www.boeing.com/defense/t-7a/#/gallery>



Columbus AFB and Affected Military Training Airspace

#### What is the Public Scoping Process?

Public scoping is an early and open process, conducted in compliance with NEPA, for identifying issues and alternatives to be addressed in an EIS and determining who (e.g., public and government agencies) is interested in a proposed action. Public outreach is conducted as a part of the public scoping process to provide information to interested parties and to receive comments on a proposed action, alternatives, and potential impacts. Comments received during the public scoping process are considered in the preparation of the Draft EIS. A timeline showing the steps of the EIS process is on the back of this brochure.

#### Personnel and Construction

Columbus AFB and surrounding region would experience a 43 staff and 82 dependent increase during the aircraft transition period of 2028 and 2029 and a 31 staff and 59 dependent decrease (relative to current personnel levels) after 2029. Six military construction and nine facility sustainment, restoration, and modernization projects would be undertaken. These projects include construction at Columbus AFB of a new Ground Based Training System Facility, Unit Maintenance Trainer Facility, and hush house; addition to the Egress Shop; and 61 T-7A shelters.

## Proposed Action and Alternatives

DAF is considering the Proposed Action, two reasonable action alternatives (i.e., Alternatives 1 and 2), and no action. These alternatives are described as follows:

### **Proposed Action: 61 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations at a Level Sustaining Pilot Training while Simultaneously Phasing Out the T-38C and Phasing In the T-7A**

Columbus AFB would receive 61 T-7A aircraft between 2028 and 2030. Pilot training operations would gradually transition from the T-38C to the T-7A during 2028, 2029, and 2030, and pilot training operations would be performed at a level to meet DAF's anticipated training needs. Operations are takeoffs, landings, the approach phase of a "touch-and-go", and the takeoff phase of a "touch-and-go". Up to 474 annual nighttime T-7A operations would occur. Existing military training airspace would be used, and no changes to airspace configurations would be required. All T-7A operations would be sub-sonic.

### **Alternative 1: 61 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations 25 Percent Greater than the Proposed Action**

Alternative 1 would be identical to the Proposed Action except T-7A operations would be 25 percent greater than the Proposed Action. Up to 593 annual nighttime T-7A operations would occur. Alternative 1 covers a potential scenario in which DAF requires a surge or increase in pilot training operations above current plan.

### **Alternative 2: 77 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations 25 Percent Greater than the Proposed Action**

Alternative 2 would be identical to the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 except 16 additional T-7A aircraft would be delivered in 2028 and 77 T-7A shelters would be constructed. T-7A operations would be identical to Alternative 1. Alternative 2 covers a potential scenario in which another military installation is unable to accept delivery of all their T-7A aircraft and some of those aircraft need to be reassigned to Columbus AFB.

### **No Action Alternative: Does Not Implement T-7A Recapitalization at Columbus AFB**

The No Action Alternative assesses the environmental consequences from taking no action and serves as a baseline to compare the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and action alternatives. For the No Action Alternative, T-38C aircraft would remain in service with no changes to operations at Columbus AFB or airspace areas even though they will reach the end of their service lives within the next decade. No changes to the number of personnel and dependents would occur, and no construction would be undertaken.

## Environmental Impact Analysis Process

DAF anticipates potential for the following notable environmental impacts from the Proposed Action and action alternatives:

1. Increased air emissions, particularly nitrogen oxides.
2. Increased noise from aircraft operations because the T-7A is inherently louder than the T-38C and the addition of nighttime operations may be bothersome to some residents. Increased noise could have a disproportionate impact on certain populations and impact off-installation land use compatibility.
3. Increased potential for bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazards.
4. Construction may have a minor impact on downstream water quality.

The EIS will model air emissions, noise levels, and the number of sleep and school disturbance events and compare to current conditions. DAF will also consult with appropriate resource agencies and Native American tribes to determine the potential for significant impacts. Consultation will be incorporated into the preparation of the EIS and will include, but not be limited to, consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Additional analysis will be provided in the Draft EIS, which is anticipated in late 2022. The Final EIS and a decision on which alternative to implement is expected in mid-2023.

## EIS Timeline



Please provide comments in English on the project website, by email at [nolan.swick@us.af.mil](mailto:nolan.swick@us.af.mil), or via postal mail to Mr. Nolan Swick, AFCEC/CZN; Attn: Columbus AFB T-7A Recapitalization EIS; Headquarters Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs; 100 H. East Street, Suite 4; Randolph AFB, TX 78150. The scoping materials are also available in print at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library (314 7th Street North, Columbus, Mississippi) and by request. Please consider the environment before requesting printed material.

<https://columbus.t-7anepadocuments.com/>

To ensure DAF has sufficient time to consider public input, please submit all comments by May 2, 2022.